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Review of Intensive Reading Interventions for the Elementary Grades by Wanzek, Al Otaiba, and McMaster

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Review of Wenzel, J., Al Otaiba, S., & McMasters, K. (2020). *Intensive reading interventions for the elementary grades*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Wenzel, Otaiba, and McMaster's (2020) *Intensive Reading Interventions for the Elementary Grades* is a helpful text for teachers, administrators, professors, or literacy professionals who are seeking intensive intervention strategies for tier three students facing significant reading difficulties in reading. The purpose of this book is to provide effective, data-based intervention to support teachers working with students who are struggling to learn how to read and write. The authors compiled a list of strategies and resources for teachers to use to help students develop necessary skills they need in order to become successful readers. The second book in the Guilford Series on intensive instruction, readers should be prepared to embark on an engaging journey of vignettes, research summaries, lesson plans, and other materials the authors have compiled on various reading difficulties students face.

The book is composed of eight chapters in which the authors begin most with a vignette on the issue that will be discussed in the chapter. At the end of each chapter, the authors provide lesson plans on how the strategies can be implemented and examples of next steps if students require more intensive intervention. The book follows a linear model for intervention, building on foundational skills to ultimately have students ready to read independently with success.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Intensive Interventions. In chapter one, the authors introduce readers to a description of intensive intervention and which students may need intensive intervention. In this chapter, the authors elaborate on definitions and terms associated with intensive intervention. The authors state that "if many students in a grade level are struggling with meeting reading expectations after reviewing core or supplemental instruction" there is likely a problem with the "validity of instruction or the fidelity of the implementation" (p.7). Therefore,

this means that there is not a need for intensive instruction, but rather a need for more effective assessments or instruction. Students who demonstrate need for intensive intervention show “insufficient response to generally effective, audience-based reading instruction provided in the grade level classroom, as well as small group reading instruction” (p.7).

Otaiba, Rouse, and Baker (2018) cite research by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2015) that indicate that 36% of fourth grade students are able to read on grade level in US schools. This same report by NAEP, 2015, also indicates that success in reading on grade level is even more challenging for students facing poverty, students from minority groups, and students with disabilities. Hence, supplementary small group reading instruction provided to students can demonstrate “power for preventing and remediating many reading difficulties” (Wanzek, Petscher, Otaiba, Rivas, Jones, Kent, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 2017, p.1103).

Chapter 2: Intensive Reading Interventions to Support Phonological and Phonemic Awareness. In chapter two, the authors introduce readers to intensive interventions to support students “understanding and awareness of the systematic structure of spoken language” (p. 12). The information in the chapter can be beneficial for individuals with limited background in early literacy working with students who experience difficulty in reading. The information can support both lower and upper elementary school students with intensive intervention needs in developing phonological and phonemic skills necessary to improve reading proficiency. The authors argue that scope and sequence are important when providing this type of instruction in an effort to prevent students from confusing sounds that are closely related. They also argue that scope and sequence will allow students adequate time to learn a sound before another new sound is introduced.

The authors contend that teachers have flexibility in how much time is spent on these activities as (s)he determines whether the students have mastered a good understanding of skills. As teachers provide instruction for students in phonemic and phonological awareness, it is necessary to understand that the purpose of teaching these skills is to “support students’ ability to acquire phonics and word recognition and ultimately to read for understanding” (Wanzek et al. 2017, p. 20). This book provides general and explicit examples of intensive instruction through a complete set of lesson plans. Each lesson addresses a component of the skills progressing from broad (e.g., writing the words in sentences) to narrow (e.g. segmenting phonemes). The chapter ends with additional links and materials including books, PowerPoints, to online resources teachers can access to provide support for students in receiving intensive intervention in phonological and phonemic awareness.

Chapter 3: Intensive Intervention to Support Phonics and Word Recognition. After students gain acceptable results in phonological and phonemic awareness, teachers move to provide intensive intervention support in phonics and word recognition. The authors purport that “with careful instruction, students gain knowledge of predictable relationships and patterns between letters and sounds that allow them to change print into language for understanding” (p. 35). Research indicates that explicit instruction of such skills as discussed so far should commence in kindergarten (Noltemeyer, Joseph, & Kunesch, 2019). However, some students advance to higher elementary grades without developing such skills and thus, there is need for intensive instruction.

Researchers on word learning and vocabulary (e.g., Wanzek et al. 2017) agree that when providing instruction in word recognition words should not be taught in isolation, but students should learn and practice words from text that they read daily. This concept is important because

as students encounter words frequently, they develop confidence to attack words. Some educators may argue that the explicit teaching of phonics and word recognition is not necessary; however, we should keep in mind that the strategies discussed in this book are for tier three students who need intensive instruction in reading. To effectively teach students to master the alphabetic principle, teachers should be knowledgeable in order to identify student strengths and errors to design appropriate instruction. This knowledge is also necessary to monitor students' progress in mastering phonics and word recognition to be able to move on to other skills.

Chapter 4: Intensive Instruction to Support Fluency. In chapter 4, the authors discuss intensive interventions to support fluency. The strategies discussed in this section are in line with what current research (e.g., Felid, Begeny, & Kim, 2019) in fluency intervention suggests for tier 3 learners. Research indicates that early intervention of reading fluency is “important for reducing the likelihood that struggling students will fall increasingly behind their peers” (Felid, Begeny, & Kim, 2019). The authors highlight the importance of modeling fluent reading to students and the importance of providing specific feedback to students so they can know what aspects need improving. Another aspect of helping students improve fluency skills is helping students set goals as they practice reading. That way students can monitor their own progress while working towards their specific reading achievement goals. The instructional practices in this chapter are simple and easy to follow, with lesson plans and other materials for teacher support.

Chapter 5: Intensive Instruction to Support Oral Language. This chapter engages the reader with information about the importance of understanding language for children to make sense of what they read. Language development is necessary for students to become fluent readers. Students

who may have had language delays or a lack of exposure to oral language can potentially have reading difficulties.

Recognizing this issue, the authors provide a crash course in language development and instruction for those who may need it, before delving into strategies to help students develop oral language which is beneficial to reading and writing. The authors call for explicit rather than implicit instruction in language development, using research highlighted within the chapter to support their view.

Chapter 6: Intensive Instruction to Support Language and Reading Comprehension. In this chapter, the authors offer the reader research supporting language and reading comprehension instruction. Throughout the book, the authors advocate for explicit instruction in vocabulary to improve reading comprehension for students with difficulties in reading. They delve into the importance of strategy instruction for students experiencing significant difficulties with reading comprehension.

The lesson plans that follow demonstrate how one would use the strategies from the chapter to provide explicit instruction for students. The resources include additional research materials and extra resources teachers can use to build a repertoire of skills to assist students who need intensive instruction in reading comprehension and language development.

Chapter 7: Intensive Instruction to Support Writing to Read. In this chapter the authors begin by arguing the important relationship between reading and writing, and why writing instruction is necessary. By highlighting the research supporting teaching writing in relation to reading, the authors make a strong argument for including intensive intervention instruction for

writing and reading. They argue that “teaching reading and writing to support development in both areas makes sense, because learning in both domains relies on similar knowledge and processes” (p. 126).

Similar with all strategies listed in this book, the authors call for explicit modeling, demonstration, guided practice with scaffolding and feedback, and independent practice. The examples presented are both formal and informal, with resources that provide additional full set lesson plans for writing instruction.

Chapter 8: Multicomponent Reading Intervention. This chapter delves into the research on multicomponent reading interventions that address several reading skills. This chapter acts as a summary to the entire book, as the authors advocate for multicomponent interventions for students who may need it.

When the interventions have been implemented, it is necessary to reflect on what went well and what needs improvement. If there is a need for more intensified interventions, teachers should proceed accordingly. This book provides a general tool kit for teachers working with students with very intensive needs in reading. It can also work for students whose needs are not so intense. Some students may require interventions in all areas addressed in this book or a few areas, the book can serve as a resource for which ever area requires intervention.

It is important during intervention to monitor progress to ensure that students are making adequate gains when working with a multicomponent intervention. The ultimate goal of any intervention plan or program should be “to help students accelerate their growth on basic skills so that they could access grade-level multicomponent instruction” (p.158). The research-based

interventions presented in this book are not new, however, it is ideal to have them all in one spot, instead of having to search through several research articles on each topic. It makes intensive interventions for reading accessible for all teachers.

The interventions provided in this book can be beneficial for a wide variety of students facing reading difficulties. The examples are practical, logical, and intentional. However, it is essential to note that these strategies are intended for Tier 3 students. Those who consider using this book as a resource should keep in mind that students' needs differ, and therefore, as some students may benefit from these instructional practices, others may not. Also, important to note, is that if one plans on using the strategies highlighted in this book, it is necessary to follow them with fidelity and flexibility to achieve maximum results. I believe that the authors have captured salient issues related to reading difficulties and remediation.

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